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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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## GERHART HAUPTMANN: A RETROSPECT.

The German public, both learned and unlearned, gives to Hauptmann the place of honor among its contemporary men of letters with singular unanimity. Since the representation of his first play in 1889 he has scored two tremendous popular successes, such as seldom fall to the lot of any man, in "Die Weber" and "Die versunkene Glocke." The sources of his plots and the literary influences which are supposed to be shown in this or that one of his plays have become subjects of profound study. Epithets, seemingly mutually exclusive, such as naturalistic and mystic, have been freely applied to him. It may, therefore, be worth while to review briefly some of his salient characteristics as shown in his plays, and to try to draw some general conclusion concerning his achievements so far.

The unlikeness of "Der arme Heinrich" to its immediate predecessors has been for me the occasion of reading again in chronological order the longish series of his separate works, which began a little more than a decade and a half ago. Such a re-reading, which places in orderly sequence both the often perused favorites and the works that have received scanty attention, is profitable. In Hauptmann's case the failures are as instructive as the successes, for the path of his progress has not been a steady ascent but is comparable rather to a road through a hilly country with its ups and downs.

The whole series arouses in the reader the spirit of thankfulness that amidst the sundry and manifold temptations of modern literary life Hauptmann has always taken himself and his art seriously. Nothing suggests that he is under contract to some enterprising manager to write a play to fit this actress's eyebrows or that actor's Roman nose. But while we may justly be thankful for such dignity of attitude, it is nevertheless not

without its dangers, for he who carries himself like one of the immortals must be judged by the standard he has himself set.

As his published works with the exception of three only, an epic and two short stories, are dramas, at least in form, we must necessarily think of the dramatist merely in any estimate of the poet. Now, one of the most marked characteristics of the dramatist is his dualism. Indeed, two of his works which are not dramas and which were written earliest of all that has been published, his fantastic epic "Promethidenloos" (dated 1885) and his short story about a railway gateman ("Bahnwärter Thiel," written in 1887 but not published till 1890), reveal at once the existence of two Hauptmanns. The dramas to this day show that the dualism still exists, and the blending of the two Hauptmanns into one is far from accomplished.

The author of the epic, of "Hanneles Himmelfahrt," "Die versunkene Glocke," and "Der arme Heinrich," is decidedly other-worldly. The author of "Bahnwärter Thiel" and of the remaining dramas has an equal fondness for this earth. This statement is made with no thought of reproach, but only as an attempt to define and in the belief that such terms as these, as idealism and realism, with all their host of synonyms and glosses, should in no sense be contrasted as high and low, as praise and blame. The sole question should be: in which realm does an author most naturally move.

In his epic Hauptmann is hazy, indistinct, wordy. If he has ideas, he fails to make them intelligible. His thoughts do not rise into the realms of light and air because they belong there as beings of the ether, but balloon-like, because they are inflated. In a sense it is idle to comment upon this first publication of Hauptmann, for he soon perceived its vacuity and withdrew it from sale. Nevertheless it is in a very real way the forerunner of "Hannele," "Die versunkene Glocke," and "Der arme Heinrich." In spite of

all the astonishing advance they have a certain indistinctness and haziness of thought, a certain verbosity, of course in varying degrees, that amount to a serious blemish.

They are all three essentially undramatic. It is hard to keep down the suspicion that "Hannele" owes its undeniable charm to the same element that makes the story of the Sleeping Beauty or "Alice in Wonderland" prime favorites, unlike as they are to it and to each other. Given even the ideal translator and a sympathetic rendition, it is doubtful whether "Die versunkene Glocke" could ever achieve more than the most transient success upon the English-speaking stage. It has its attractions for the Germans, for in their fondness for the legend and the fairy story they have kept nearer to perpetual youth than we, but the chief interest is the story, not the drama. Who of us can understand why Heinrich fled to the heights with Rautendelein and what he was doing there? Skilled as we are in America in establishing new religions, it puzzles any of us to form even a dim conception of what Heinrich's new faith was and of its connection with that fantastic chime of bells, or whatever it was, that he was constructing. Nor can we console ourselves with the belief that we are to blame and that Hauptmann's fancy soars to heights beyond our ken, for when he is clear in his own mind he finds means to express himself in such a way that even a child can understand somewhat of his meaning. So there remains for us little besides the story which we must necessarily enjoy in less degree than the Germans.

As for "Der arme Heinrich," it comes as near his youthful epic as is possible for the Hauptmann of to-day and is distinctly below the level of much that he has written. It is, indeed, questionable whether it is possible to turn into a drama the calm and naïve narrative of Hartmann von Aue, which appeals to us perhaps as strongly as to his contemporaries. In any event, it is certain that Hauptmann has not made it dramatic and has robbed it of much of its charm in the process of change. So far as these dramas entitle us to speak, we must wish for Hauptmann, the idealist, a better acquaintance with the genuine stuff that dreams are made of.

In view of all the achievements up to the present,

the other Hauptmann, so clearly revealed to us in "Bahnwärter Thiel," must seem to us the greater poet. He knows what he sees and has astonishing power to reconstruct it for us. So far as outward details go, he was a past master in this art from his first drama on. In power to create real human beings and to motivate their acts sufficiently, however, he fell far short at first. His dramatic personages might as well have been tailor's dummies. He made us see the draperies with noteworthy clearness and nothing more. It is interesting to watch his gradual gain in power to create real men and women, so that the important personages, at least, of his later naturalistic plays are alive beyond a peradventure. His chief dramatic virtues to-day, and he possesses them in a degree unusual in dramatic literature, are capacity to see, capacity to describe in remarkably terse and transparent prose, capacity to create living and breathing human beings of certain types, and, in the main, that most indispensable quality in the drama, capacity to interest.

Over against these virtues must be set certain shortcomings. For the taste of those of us who still demand in the drama a vigorous causality Hauptmann is often disappointing. He has not yet by any means progressed to the point where we can say in advance that a new play by him will not exhibit the chief fault of "Die Weber," lack of dramatic unity. We do no injustice to say of this great production that it is a series of dramatic pictures rather than a drama and that it does not so much end as that it quits. This is Hauptmann's greatest failing.

Again, we are justified in protesting against his too frequent choice of weaklings and the mentally and morally unbalanced as the chief persons of his plays. He has undoubted, but dangerous, power in the treatment of such mental and moral phenomena. Five of his dramas, for example, reach their culmination, more or less, in suicide. Now, such topics are, of course, legitimate, but is it an absurd ideal to ask that even the naturalistic tragedy should preferably deal with the normal and the strong in the storm and stress of life? If we must have the abnormal, let it be the super-normal in preference to the subnormal. Here would seem to be the greatest field for the display of Hauptmann's power rather than in the land of

clouds into which he has heretofore generally betaken himself when he has ceased to be realistic as we understand realism in him. But, leaving all such theoretical considerations aside, think what might have resulted if he could have created "Die Weber" with the strong dramatic structure of "Fuhrmann Henschel!"

A further source of weakness is Hauptmann's extensive use of dialect. Here, of course, we enter upon disputed ground, so long as the place of dialect in literature remains unsettled. This much is at least sure, that whatever objection may be properly brought against dialect works that are seriously trying to be literature can be brought against Hauptmann. He does not write dialect, as did Burns, from that inward necessity which is at once its excuse and its glorious justification. It is quite a different thing to write dialect because you think it than to write it because you think the characters you create ought to think it.

Aside from such considerations, Hauptmann's prose is, however, admirable for the work that he has heretofore done, with the possible exception of "Florian Geyer." In this ambitious and creditable failure many a passage causes one to wonder whether the minute detail of Hauptmann's style is suited to the drama of wider sweep where minuteness and detail are out of place. But such wondering is idle until the drama appears. It is not easy to praise Hauptmann's verse so unreservedly. Here his lesson is not yet learned, and in this point "Der arme Heinrich" shows retrogression rather than advance when compared with "Die versunkene Glocke."

It seems impossible to resist the conclusion that Hauptmann, even at his best, has so far fallen short of actual greatness by a little. But the number of his years is still far from three score and ten, and such a conclusion, even though it be just now, may yet be put to shame by the achievements of the long and productive future that we may wish for him.

CHARLES HARRIS.

*Western Reserve University.*

## OMISSIONS FROM THE EDITIONS OF CHAUCER.

Only the special student of the canon of Chaucer is aware, perhaps, how much we are indebted in that respect to the fifteenth-century scribe John Shirley, several of whose commonplace-books, filled with his transcriptions from Chaucer and Lydgate and enriched with his own curious notes and headings, still remain to us. Editors of Chaucerian and Lydgatian texts have so often passed censure upon the carelessness and bad spelling of their Shirley copies that we may be tempted to forget our obligations to that same Shirley in other respects, for his definite ascription of poems to their authors and for his preservation of some texts which would otherwise have been lost to us. If, for instance, we examine the evidence of contemporary or nearly contemporary scribes as to the authorship of the minor poems of Chaucer, we shall find that a large part of our data come from Shirley; nor should we overlook the fact that the amount of knowledge which we have of his work and of his personality gives to his testimony a something which no unsigned and undated copy, however excellent in itself, can possess.

Such an examination has its difficulty, because of the continued lack of critical editions of the minor poems, from which alone we shall be able to determine how many of the existing copies of any one poem are due, as most of those in mss. Harley 7333 and Addit. 34360 are due, to a Shirley original; or how nearly the Chaucerian texts of ms. Pepys 2006 are related to the Shirley family of manuscripts. But even with this drawback the importance of Shirley as a witness is easily demonstrated. We have of the *A. B. C.* thirteen copies, only two of which bear the name of Chaucer; one of these is by Shirley, the other is in the codex Pepys 2006. Of the *Anelida and Arceite* there remain twelve copies, and here only the two written by Shirley and the manuscript Harley 372 state that the poem is by Chaucer. The eight texts of the *Mars* and of the *Venus* are marked as Chaucer's by Shirley only, barring the testimony of the untrustworthy Selden B. 24 as to the *Venus*. The poem to *Pity* exists in nine manuscripts, and only the copies by and from Shirley give Chaucer as the author. Half of the